REPORT

to

THE SOUTHWARK DEANERY
STRATEGY FOR MISSION COMMITTEE

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February 1988

INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken in order to briefly assess the process and progress of the Southwark Deanery to date and to assist the Strategy for Mission Committee in its reflection and discussion of ideas for future directions, roles and projects for the Deanery. One-on-one interviews were conducted with eight rectors of parishes in the Deanery to gain an understanding of their various missions and identify opportunities for Deanery-wide cooperation. The parishes that were selected represent a cross-section of parishes within the Deanery, both large and small, both financially stable and aided congregations, both located in Center City and in South Philadelphia. Seven of the eight rectors interviewed for this study are considered active participants in the Deanery. One less active member was also interviewed in order to gain a different perspective on the Deanery and its role.

The amount of time that was spent in dialogue with Deanery constituents was limited to the clergy and hardly adequate, given the full history and diversity of its member parishes and organizations. This report, therefore, should be seen as a summary of one outsider's reflection on the Deanery and its possibilities rather than a concrete recommendation from a consultant. What is presented is a framework for discussing the Deanery's mission and a beginning list of ideas for concrete action to further that mission. The report is designed to promote discussion and dialogue; it will most likely raise more questions than it answers. In the process, it is hoped that the report will prove stimulating and thought-provoking, and helpful in moving the Deanery toward a more defined and active ministry role in the Southwark area.

Anne Wenzel
The Conservation Company

SOUTHWARK DEANERY'S CURRENT CONTEXT

During interviews with Southwark rectors, Rev. Lou Temme received high praise, across the board, for his tenure as Dean. A young man relative to former Southwark deans, Dean Temme has the energy, talent and commitment to make Deanery meetings more organized and interesting to its constituency. In addition to the regular meetings of the Deanery and its committees, two Deanery-wide information-gathering projects have been initiated. The compilation of data in the Southwark report and more recent distribution of parish questionnaires begin the process of understanding the degree and diversity of present ministries and of identifying new mission opportunities in the Deanery.

While support for the Deanery and interest in "the Southwark experiment" have developed under the capable leadership of Dean Temme, there is some frustration over the lack of concrete action and tangible progress to date. The active Southwark rectors are committed to the Deanery, in concept, and are willing to support it to the extent that time allows. In general, the rectors sense the great possibilities of collaboration but are not sure just where to begin. Yet there is a strong desire to see <u>something</u> happen.

The lack of resources available for Deanery-wide programs hampers its ability to move forward with concrete action projects. Rev. Temme is the only volunteer staff person for the Deanery, spending less than four hours a week on Deanery business. And there is little money for Deanery administration or programming.

Action to date has been further slowed due to the lack of clear purpose and vision concerning the exact role and mission of the Deanery as a "middle level" organization between the diocese and the local parishes. But the very nebulousness and lack of clear role for the Deanery places the Strategy for Mission Committee in an exciting, if not challenging, position. Indeed, the role and mission of Southwark Deanery is in a process of evolving and being shaped. The challenge for the Deanery, then, becomes finding its niche as an intermediary body, relevant and useful for both its member parishes and the diocese, while not threatening the "turf" of either. Once its role has been clarified, the appropriate structure and resources necessary to develop the Deanery can be identified.

As a first step, it might be useful for the Strategy for Mission Committee to review and discuss the various roles for the Deanery as presented in this report. This discussion might be opened at a later date to include a larger group. It is important to remember, however, that while broad-based constituent input would be helpful in the role defining process, it is not essential. Some rectors feel that the Deanery is just too large and diverse for real collaboration to exist. For the moment, it is suggested that the Strategy for Mission Committee work with active members and build a small core of support. The best way to assure participation in a voluntary organization is to make the organization and its activities meaningful and relevant for the bulk of its constituents. Not all constituents need be a part of the role-defining process.

It is worth noting that, because the individuals interviewed for this report were all clergy, it is also important to solicit ideas and input about the Deanery's role from the lay constituency. Some of this will happen in the Strategy for Mission Committee meetings, which includes lay representatives. Another forum should probably be established to continue the dialogue critical in the mission refining process with lay constituents.

In addition to articulating a clear vision for the Deanery, the Strategy for Mission Committee might think through possible action steps it might initiate to further advance the Deanery's mission. As part of the Southwark Experiment, it would behoove those most active in the Deanery to do something concrete, a small but highly visible and successful project, to prove that Southwark is indeed "on the move." Such a project, in addition to meeting a concrete need, may prove to be a rallying point for the Deanery, maintaining or renewing interest, leading to increased support of the Deanery mission by both constituents and the diocese, and building momentum for future, perhaps more sophisticated, Deanery projects.

This report, then, may provide a springboard for a two-step process:

1) To prompt reflection on the role of the Southwark Deanery, to be discussed by the Strategy for Mission Committee and by a larger Deanery body as appropriate.

2) To review a number of possible action projects, both those presented in this report and others identified by the Strategy for Mission Committee and/or other Deanery body, in terms of their feasibility and impact as small but successful "first steps" in moving the Deanery toward a stronger, better defined middle level Church organization.

FRAMING THE DEANERY'S ROLE

The plethora of Episcopal churches in the Southwark Deanery offers a rich variety of spiritual, social and service ministry opportunities to the equally diverse and varied population they collectively serve. Urban Philadelphia is <u>not</u> suburbia; the diversity of downtown is a uniqueness and strength that the Deanery should capitalize on. Keeping in mind that no one church can be all things to all people, the Southwark churches, working together, can provide more things to its people than any one church could provide in isolation. This is a fundamental characteristic of the Deanery: that collaboration between churches can, in certain instances, result in better ministry than what any single church could do or be. The challenge of collaboration, then, is to identify those opportunities where collaboration between churches enhances the participating local parishes' mission goals and objectives and, ideally, builds toward the proverbial "whole that is greater than the sum of its parts."

In order to encourage thinking about future directions for the Deanery, a framework for clarifying possible roles is outlined. For

discussion purposes, the four roles have been framed as separate, though not mutually exclusive. These are listed in a progressive order, from least to most "active" in terms of the time and resource commitments required to successfully initiate.

Each of the four roles requires a different degree of time and effort on the part of both rectors and lay people and of financial and other resources to sustain them. The Strategy for Mission Committee may wish to review each of these roles, reading the examples of concrete actions that might be initiated under each one, and discuss generally the strengths and weaknesses of each. The Committee should also weigh the political implications and the feasibility of each role. In a diocese that has been described as "very congregational," the more expanded collaborative roles may require more time and development to realize.

1. Support and Fellowship Group

The mission of the Church in the city is in many ways radically different than the Church's mission in the suburbs, exurbs or rural areas of the country. This is particularly true for those neighborhood churches that are in transitional neighborhoods and those parishes formally designated as "mission congregations." Likewise, the corresponding opportunities and challenges of working in the city are quite different, at times taxing, for the clergy themselves. The Deanery setting can provide an opportunity for clergy (more than lay people) to come together to share their trials and tribulations, find support and fellowship from fellow rectors.

2. Education and Idea-sharing Forum

Given the unique characteristics of ministry in the city, there are a number of issues that could well be discussed and explored amongst parishes "in the same boat." These discussion forums would, most likely, further build support between individuals and congregations, even energize individuals and congregations to new action. Certain educational programs require more extensive planning and management than any single parish can provide. Idea-sharing is built on the notion that "two heads are better than one." Here the value of the deanery vehicle, with its multiple-member constituency and diversity, is obvious. The challenge is to make such forums or other programs truly valuable in terms of quality and relevance to Deanery constituents. Subject areas would have to be carefully selected and the appropriate structure and content of the actual program worked out to truly deliver quality educational and idea-sharing forums for the Deanery. (See Action Ideas for examples of possible content areas.)

3. Program Development

The Deanery may wish to identify and then develop an actual program for implementation. Such a program might benefit the Deanery's congregants (such as the Lenten Sunday School developed in the late 1970's

that was such an initial success) or the community at large. Piloting Deanery-wide programs could help individual parishes stretch to become part of a larger church while meeting concrete needs and goals of individual congregations.

4. Long-range Planning

This role grows out of the reality that, while there is a need for long-range planning (including the development of a rational plan concerning the future configuration of church facilities for ministry needs in Center City and South Philadelphia) there is no formal planning office or function within the diocesan structure. What is entailed in comprehensive planning is detailed in the following section. The Deanery, while not equipped at this moment with either the authority or resources for such an effort, might wish to reflect on a possible role in long-range planning.

ACTION IDEAS FOR SOUTHWARK DEANERY

What follows is a beginning compilation of ideas, only briefly sketched, around which the Deanery might organize and take action in the near future. These ideas are mere seeds; any one of them would require more thought and greater attention to details concerning their feasibility, the appropriate steps, funding and time frame necessary to implement them.

Support and Fellowship

- Fellowship get-togethers

  Arrange for regular (but not too frequent) dinners, retreats or similar activities, either informal or with a scheduled program, so that Deanery ministers may come together to relax, catch up with one another and share fellowship, thereby "charging their batteries."

Education and Idea-sharing

- Education/discussion forums

  The Deanery might sponsor a series of education/discussion forums on issues of interest to its constituents. Such forums should be educational while engaging participants in meaningful and constructive dialogue on issues of relevance to themselves as individuals and congregations. A fundamental mission issue to address might be what the role of the Church in the city could and should be. A carefully structured forum on this issue within the next 12 months would nicely compliment the current work of the Strategy for Mission Committee.

- Idea-sharing forums

  Closely related to the education/discussion forum, the idea-sharing forum would be established to share concrete ideas, tested or otherwise, on more effective ministry. Such forums can invite guest speakers or experts (from within the diocese or from outside) to make presentations and share their experiences and "lessons learned." Or the program might involve a brain-storming session wherein a certain issue is framed for the participants and then possible ways to address the issue are discussed in a creative and open way. In both instances, concrete ideas and suggestions should be generated that will, it is hoped, be translated into practice back at the parish. Possible topics range from how to generate more leadership and volunteerism within congregations to the management of heterogeneous congregations to effective evangelization tools and techniques for various sub-groups within the Center City/South Philadelphia.

  For instance, the Episcopal parishes might learn a great deal about stewardship programs from the Baptists. (Cases have been documented where Catholic parishes, upon initiating stewardship programs, have increased Sunday collections 200% within a year.) Or a forum could be held to examine special ministry needs of homosexuals. Or a group might explore ways to appeal to the spiritual needs of Yuppies. Or a series of working sessions might be set up to discuss how to work in a neighborhood where over 50% of the population is transient and/or "unchurched." The goal or outcome of any of these meetings would be to better minister to existing sub-groups or develop new plans for evangelization of the "unchurched." These are all areas that are relevant to a number of Southwark parishes.

Program Development

It is commonly acknowledged, and interviews confirmed, that the congregations in the Deanery, while close in physical proximity, vary greatly. Such diversity, while perhaps hindering certain types of solidarity-building, can and should be built on. The inclusion of both "metro" churches and neighborhood churches, both the relatively affluent churches of Center City and the "mission" churches south of South Street, within the same Deanery boundary furnish a unique opportunity for exploring a larger concept of Church. In many respects the Southwark Deanery provides a microcosm of the larger world in which such diversity exists, and an exciting opportunity for the Church to play out a role as bridger between the different races, ethnic/cultural groups and socio-economic classes.

- Deanery-wide newsletter

  A Deanery-wide newsletter including special events, educational programs available in individual parishes and opportunities for service ministry would keep all constituents informed about Church-related activities and ministries. The value of a newsletter stems from the reality that Episcopaleans, to a certain extent, "shop

around" for the liturgy of their choice. In Southwark Deanery, the group is particularly mobile, first because of the number of choices available within a relatively small geographic distance, and second because of the relatively large number of "metro" churches in the Deanery that pull people from beyond the immediate neighborhood. With so many "shopping" for liturgy, a next step would be to them to travel for spiritual growth, educational and service opportunities not available at their own parishes but certainly available elsewhere in the Deanery. Such a newsletter could provide comprehensive and up-to-date information on all such opportunities for congregants.

- Resource/Skills exchange

An up-to-date listing could be advertised in the newsletter or similar inter-parish communications channel to link up individuals and congregations with certain resources and skills with those in need of the same resources and skills. For example, Parish X may be initiating an architectural study of their church hall, hoping to remodel a large meeting area into smaller classrooms. The parish might have an architecture or engineer available to do the structural study but could benefit from an educational administrator to help design the most desirable layout and use of space for educational purposes. This "resource person" might be borrowed from a neighboring church in exchange for a Bible study specialist to help Parish Y's education committee develop a curriculum for young adults. Or Parish Z might have on its parishioner rolls the owner of a lumber company who is willing to provide a 40% discount on materials to Parish X. Such an exchange is based on the assumption that resources are out there. One never knows what is available, at low or no cost, unless one asks.

- Shared staff

A paid staff person that a single parish could not afford might be shared by two or more parishes. One example might be the sharing of a full-time youth minister for two or three parishes or indeed the Deanery as a whole. Such a youth minister might perform a "needs assessment" of young people in the community--including their emotional, recreational and spiritual needs--and then develop and coordinate appropriate programs for them. Or a Deanery youth minister could develop training programs and a support network for local parish volunteers who work with youth.

A shared youth minister may be a particularly valuable and timely project for the Deanery, as the number of young people involved in the church needs to be expanded to compensate for disproportionately large elderly congregations. The Deanery might develop and refine a model that would be truly effective in attracting more young people to the Church in Center City and South Philadelphia, a model that the diocese might be interesting in refining and replicating elsewhere in the diocese.

Who shares the staff (only two or three parishes or the entire Deanery) depends on the responsibilities assigned to the staff person. If program materials are to be developed, they could be shared across the Deanery. On the other hand, if the youth minister is to work directly with youth, his/her scope would most likely be more limited.

- Joint programming

Similar to sharing staff, joint programming requires that two or more parishes, if not the entire Deanery, work together to bring about something that no single parish could achieve alone. Wintershelter is a good example of an existing joint program between Trinity Memorial Church (the host site), Holy Trinity Church and other neighborhood churches. Joint programming could be geared toward educational programs for parishioners (History and Tradition in the church; Developing a Theology for Today; etc.), more efficient or cost-effective management/administration programs (bulk or co-op purchasing of supplies; shared "high tech" office equipment like word processors) or social services for the larger community. In the latter instance, a number of unmet human needs in the community cry out for attention....hunger, homelessness, health care, day care.... Trinity Memorial Church has its shelter for homeless men, St. Mary's its soup kitchen and emergency food cupboard, St. Mark's its planned AIDS hospice. The Deanery might wish to set itself the goal of establishing one new parish-based/Deanery-supported social service ministry program every two years.

- 2-parish twinning

Within the Deanery there are many opportunities for parishes to "twin" or link up in partnership with parishes greatly different from their own. Such partnerships allow for the mutual exchange of gifts, skills and experiences. Such partnerships can take the form of liturgical, social or educational exchanges, or more action-oriented projects that mutually benefit both congregants and the communities in which they live. For example, a twinning might be established between St. Mary's mission at 19th and Bainbridge and Holy Trinity on Rittenhouse Square. Located in the low-income neighborhood south of South Street, St. Mary's, through its soup kitchen, directly responds to immediate needs of its neighborhood population. The soup line requires a regular infusion of cash, food and volunteers to help serve the hungry, needs that Holy Trinity congregants are well able to assist with. The act of serving food to the poor, and perhaps more importantly of being present with them, helps to open the eyes and hearts of center city dwellers, many of whom are only peripherally aware of the harshness of poverty literally in their back yards.

In forming any such partnerships, it is important to build on both congregations' interests, needs and ideas about ministry and to

structure the arrangement so that it is mutually beneficial and enriching to both congregations. It is important that one parish not play a paternalistic role nor impose an agenda on another. In instances where community projects are an outcome, the services established would, ideally, be driven by community needs. The goal in twinning is the opportunity for individuals in different congregations to serve, learn from and grow with each other. The Deanery could play a broker role in establishing twinning relationships in its region.

Long-range Planning

By definition, long-range planning requires a proactive or future-oriented approach and "big picture perspective" in thinking about the Church in the Deanery for five to ten years hence. Inter-related factors that impact long-range planning include the size of current congregations, the financial solvency of parishes and the physical condition of parish facilities.

One long-range planning issue is the small number of congregants that member the current parishes, and the efficiency of maintaining the current number of facilities to serve this number of congregants. Almost without exception, the rectors interviewed concurred that the number of parishes that currently exist within the Deanery far exceed the number necessary to serve the current Episcopalean population. This reality is manifested in the underutilization of church space. Huge sanctuaries are home to relatively small worshiping congregations on Sundays. A study analyzing ratios between the number of congregants and the square foot of space would clearly point out inefficiencies of scale.

The problem of too many buildings is compounded by the reality that those buildings are often very old and, increasingly, in a state of disrepair. In some instances, the natural aging of the buildings combined with years of deferred maintenance render the structures increasingly unsafe. The physical infrastructure of the Church, then, becomes a "ticking timebomb," much as the deteriorating infrastructure of the city--its sewer lines, streets and highways, school buildings and recreational centers--is increasingly a public sector concern. One can anticipate the magnitude of the problem, and through planning take a proactive stance, or one can wait for the crisis to hit with full force.

The financial situation of the parishes is another important factor in long-range planning. Although only a small number of Deanery parishes are aided parishes (and therefore in a vulnerable position vis-a-vis their survival), the majority of Deanery parishes are not living within their means, not meeting their operating costs with their own pledges and contributions. The "independent parishes" in the Deanery are, in fact, quite dependent on their endowments to meet annual operating expenses. Individual churches and the Deanery as a whole must wrestle with justice and stewardship issues, particularly the costs of maintaining large facilities for small congregations, often at the expense of expanded ministry programs for people.

The Episcopal diocese is no different from other major denominations having to adapt to shifting populations and changes in socio-economic composition of certain neighborhoods, environmental factors that have profoundly impacted once-thriving parishes. What makes the Southwark situation relatively unique is the fact that many parishes have substantial endowments and are in no immediate fear of financial crisis. Hence there is little impetus for planning. Decisions relating to mergers, consolidations and closings are made on a case-by-case basis, often in a moment of crisis (when decisions must be made and fast) and in isolation, without looking at the comprehensive picture.

While there is an underlying sense, even a slowly growing consensus, that "something has got to give" in terms of the sheer number of parishes in the Southwark Deanery, another question for which there is no consensus is who should take responsibility for such hard decisions. Ideally, such restructuring decisions should be made jointly with the individual parish rector, the vestry and the diocese. At a rational level, parish mergers and consolidations make a great deal of sense in some instances. One large physical plant is more than adequate to meet the needs of a consolidated congregation; a larger congregation translates into better financial support, more members to become involve with parish programs and ministry, and a church that is more filled, and hopefully more lively, for Sunday worship.

Yet parish mergers and consolidations are undeniably hard. No matter how the action is presented (as a survival move, as a strengthening move) or how the parishioners are prepared, restructuring is usually perceived as a loss or a death. Parishes have significant and special historical places in the hearts of both individuals and communities. As in other aspects of life, however, death can lead to renewal and rebirth. One can only grieve the loss and push forward with the hope that a restructured Church is better positioned for the future.

By way of its intermediary role, between parish and diocese, the Deanery is in a strategic position to play an invaluable part in long-range planning and exploring new directions for the Church in its region. The Deanery can step back and look at options in a more comprehensive and creative way than an individual parish fighting for its own survival. And the Deanery is more attuned and aware of the local churches' needs and mission opportunities than the diocese can be. Understanding of and sensitivity to the regional context is key in making long-range planning decisions.

With this in mind, the Deanery may well wish to think through its opportunities to play a role in long-range planning.

- New directions for individual parishes

  The Deanery itself might formalize and legitimate its role in the planning process concerning the future of individual parishes, a task that is currently done by ad hoc groups established to envision new directions for those parishes. The Deanery might take the lead in structuring a planning process, convening meetings, collecting relevant data and information on options, and generally playing the

role of liaison between parishes. In looking at new directions, it is important to explore a range of options and to address the situation creatively. One option might be the consolidation of parishes, another the reconceptualization of the Church's presence in the neighborhood, with an emphasis on moving away from a traditional parish model to one that is more relevant given the current realities (e.g. a pastoral community center). A number of new models are possible and could be explored, then piloted in the Southwark Deanery. What is important is that the Deanery take the lead, insisting that creative options are indeed identified and explored, playing the role of catalyst in redirecting some of its parishes. The result might be the emergence of very different but more effective models of Church for Center City and South Philadelphia for the Year 2000.

- Comprehensive Planning

While many parishes are struggling in terms of their numbers and long-term financial stability as noted above, hard questions relating to possible consolidations and closings are shied away from. What perhaps is needed is a comprehensive examination of the number and location of parish sites to best meet the future needs of the entire Deanery. The development of a rational plan, long-range and comprehensive in scope, to address future ministry needs would help guide a number of decisions related to capital improvements and consolidations/closings that would otherwise be made in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion. If such a comprehensive effort were initiated, it would be just to look at all parishes, not just aided missions, and to think through the role of the mission congregations in the Church's overall ministry in Southwark.

The Southwark Deanery, with its collective voice, might advocate for the diocese to undertake a comprehensive planning effort to determine the number and location of parishes in the Deanery for the future. Or, the Deanery might explore the feasibility of itself conducting such a study and developing recommendations for the Bishop. The Deanery would have to think through the structure and composition of a planning committee, the tasks and time line to undertake the effort, the kinds of data needed (evaluative criteria, condition of buildings, future population trends, etc.) and the professional staff assistance needed to undertake such an effort.

FINAL COMMENTS

Regardless of the course that the Deanery's Strategy for Mission Committee charts for itself, constituents must keep in mind that organizational development is a slow process at best. It takes a great deal of commitment, effort and time--months, even years--to develop a new organization, such as a Deanery, where little precedence exists. In many ways, the Southwark Deanery is on the cutting edge, experimenting with a new model of cooperative ministry, trying to put a theology of collaboration into practice.

While some of the projects presented in this report (i.e. the Deanery-wide newsletter) might be implemented by an individual or small group of committed volunteers, it would well benefit the Deanery to have one full-time paid staff person to work on specific projects as well as nurture the overall development of the organization. This professional should be familiar with parishes and church organizing, have some planning and group process skills, and a vision of collaborative ministry that is critical to help steer the Deanery on its course. One of the greatest benefits of a full-time staff person, in addition to the professional skills brought to the job, would be his/her affiliation with and loyalty to the Deanery as a whole rather than a single parish. This independence and neutrality is important, as the staffer would help coordinate activities and play an invaluable role as liaison and facilitator between parishes, building the cooperation that is so critical to the Deanery's long-term success. Most importantly, the staff person would be responsible for keeping projects "on the front burner," developing joint ministries and exploring new directions for individual parishes as appropriate. As such, the diocese might see the Southwark experiment as a pilot, developing a relevant and genuine model of collaboration that might be replicated in other parts of the diocese.

INTERVIEWS

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St. Mary's Church

Rev. Dr. Van S. Bird
St. Simon the Cyrenian Church

Rev. Rodger Broadley
St. Luke and the Epiphany Church

Angus Davis
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